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Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

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Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries
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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Substantive preparations for the Conference: review of progress in the preparatory process for the Conference and its organization

Review of the preparatory process for the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Summary

The present report covers the state of preparations for the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, as of the end of October 2010.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 63/227, the General Assembly decided to convene the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries at a high level in the year 2011, with the mandate to comprehensively assess the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010; share best practices and lessons learned, and identify obstacles and constraints encountered as well as actions and initiatives needed to overcome them; identify new challenges and opportunities for least developed countries; reaffirm the global commitment to address the special needs of the least developed countries; mobilize additional international support measures and action in favour of the least developed countries, and, formulate and adopt a renewed partnership between the least developed countries and their development partners.

2. In the same resolution, the Assembly also decided to convene, towards the end of 2010 and/or early in 2011, no more than two meetings of the intergovernmental preparatory committee, to be preceded by two regional-level preparatory meetings, supported by broad-based and inclusive country-level preparations.

3. In its resolution 64/213, the General Assembly welcomed and accepted the generous offer of the Government of Turkey to host the Conference. The meeting of the intergovernmental preparatory committee would be held in New York in two parts, from 10 to 14 January 2011 and from 4 to 8 April 2011, each for five working days.

4. The General Assembly emphasized the importance of country-level preparations as a critical input to the preparatory process for the Conference and the implementation of and follow-up to its outcome. It requested the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to ensure effective, efficient and timely preparations for the Conference and to further mobilize and coordinate the active involvement of the organizations of the United Nations system. It also requested organizations of the United Nations system, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the regional commissions, the specialized agencies, and funds and programmes, and invited the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and other relevant international and regional organizations, within their respective mandates, to provide necessary support and actively contribute to the preparatory process and to the Conference itself. Furthermore it requested the Secretary-General to ensure, as appropriate, the full involvement of resident coordinators and country teams in preparations for the Conference, in particular in country- and regional-level preparations.

5. The General Assembly mandated that the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States would be the focal point for the preparations for the Conference. In July 2010, the Secretary-General designated Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, as the Secretary-General of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

II. State of preparations for the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

A. Date and venue of the Conference

6. The Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries will be held in Istanbul from 9 to 13 May 2011. It has been agreed in consultation with the Government of Turkey that the Conference will be held in the Lutfi Kirdar Centre in Istanbul.

B. Preparatory process at the country and regional levels

7. The preparatory process for the Conference has been underpinned by a bottom-up approach, starting with country-level preparations feeding into regional- and global-level preparations. National-level consultations were launched in 2009 with the support of United Nations resident coordinators, involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including Governments, parliamentarians, civil society and private sector representatives, and culminated in results-oriented, analytical and forward-looking national review reports on the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action.

8. As at 30 October 2010, 32 least developed countries had submitted their national reports reviewing progress made in all seven areas of the Brussels Programme of Action against the targets contained therein. Countries provided insights on their innovative strategies and best practices to be shared with and emulated by other least developed countries. Major constraints faced by least developed countries were underscored, including the impact of climate change and the financial, food and energy crises, therefore bringing out the unique vulnerabilities of groups of least developed countries, such as landlocked, small islands, food importing, energy importing, labour exporting, countries in conflict and emerging out of conflict. The adequacy of international support received and required to complement their national efforts was also analysed.

9. Two regional preparatory meetings for the Conference were convened,[1] providing an assessment of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action with distillation of lessons learned and offering policy platforms setting out both region-specific and global expectations of least developed countries from the Conference.

10. The first regional review meeting, the High-level Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries was held at the ministerial level from 18 to 20 January 2010 in Dhaka, hosted by the Government of Bangladesh and organized in cooperation with the Office of the High Representative and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The Asia-Pacific least developed countries attended, including Yemen, as well as other member States and major stakeholders of the Brussels Programme of Action. The meeting adopted the Dhaka Outcome Document, which was taken note

[1] The reports of the two regional reviews are being made available as documents A/CONF.219/IPC/3 and A/CONF.219/IPC/4.

of by the Commission at its sixty-sixth annual session, held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, in May 2010.

11. The second regional preparatory meeting was organized jointly by the Office of the High Representative, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa. It took place in Addis Ababa on 8 and 9 March 2010 at the ministerial level and was attended by Government officials from 25 African least developed countries, as well as parliamentarians, civil society and private sector representatives, bilateral and multilateral partners as well as regional organizations. The outcome of the Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting was endorsed by the Third Annual Joint African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and the ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, which took place in Lilongwe in March 2010.

C. Expert-level substantive preparations

12. As part of the preparatory process for the Conference, a number of expert-level preparatory meetings were held under the overall coordination and guidance of the Office of the High Representative with a view to review progress in the implementation of the Brussels Programme and examine the priorities of least developed countries for the next development decade.

13. A panel event on the topic "Resource mobilization for least developed countries' sustainable growth and development" was organized by the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations, in close cooperation with the Office of the High Representative, on 19 May 2010 in New York at Columbia University. In his keynote speech, Kemal Dervis, Vice-President of the Global Economy and Development Programme at the Brookings Institution and former UNDP Administrator, stressed that least developed countries would be affected by the long-term effects of the financial and economic crisis, especially through the increased volatility of commodity prices, foreign direct investment and aid flows as well as interest and exchange rates, which increased uncertainty and vulnerability. Other panellists highlighted the bottlenecks towards development faced by least developed countries, for example, low agricultural productivity, vulnerability to external shocks or post-conflict issues. The advantages of budget support were underscored, especially for highly aid-dependent countries, and the complementarities of aid and private capital flows. It was stressed that not only the quantity of aid needed to increase but also its quality, particularly with respect to aligning its sectoral allocation with the priorities of recipient countries, including infrastructure, technology and skills development. The establishment of dedicated thematic funds to provide predictable finance for least developed countries was proposed. The presentations sparked a lively discussion among the over 70 participants, including on the role of new donors, aid conditionalities, innovative financing instruments and the complementarities between aid and other international support measures for least developed countries.

14. The forty-ninth executive session of the Trade and Development Board, held in Geneva on 8 and 9 June 2010, engaged in substantive discussions on (a) assessing least developed countries' performance since 2001 in areas covered by the UNCTAD mandate; (b) determining the key development challenges facing the least developed countries in the next decade; and (c) looking ahead at how to promote

structural transformation in least developed countries. The UNCTAD report entitled "In quest of structural progress: revisiting the performance of the least developed countries"[2] provided background analysis. The President of the Board prepared a summary of the discussions, including a set of recommendations put forward by participants on issues such as the need for a new development approach, addressing specific vulnerabilities, agriculture and food security, trade diversification, investment promotion and development finance.

15. The Permanent Missions of Belgium, Nepal and Turkey, with the collaboration of the Office of the High Representative and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized a side event to the Economic and Social Council 2010 Development Cooperation Forum on the topic "Enhancing international cooperation for least developed countries' development and transformation". The event took place in New York on 30 June 2010 with the objective to stimulate discussion among experts, development practitioners and policymakers on the role of development cooperation in least developed countries' sustainable development, notably in supporting the reduction of their vulnerability through structural transformation and their economic and social development in combination with other reforms. Panellists included Masihur Rahman, Economic Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Andris Piebalgs, European Commissioner for Development and Patrick Guillaumont of the Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Développement International.

16. A brainstorming meeting on the substantive preparations for the Conference was organized by the Office of the High Representative from 14 to 16 July 2010 on the theme "Towards a new partnership for least developed countries". The meeting helped to synthesize the lessons learned from implementing the Brussels Programme of Action that would feed into the substantive content of the next development agenda and the methodology for monitoring progress. As pointed out in her closing remarks by the Director of the Office of the High Representative, key conclusions emerged from the brainstorming as important for the formulation of a renewed partnership, including that: (a) supporting least developed countries' development was both a moral and an ethical imperative — least developed countries needed the world but the world also had an important political, economic, environmental and peace and security related stake in getting least developed countries out of their poverty and vulnerability trap; (b) business as usual would not do and the new programme of action needed to represent a new commitment of political will and deployment of efforts and resources on an unprecedented scale and scope in a number of policy areas by both the least developed countries themselves and their development partners; (c) there was need to have concrete deliverables, goals, mechanisms and targets for accountability, including more effective follow-up and monitoring mechanism; (d) least developed countries needed to particularly work on development governance and strategies focusing on endogenously driven growth and sustainable development; (e) apart from strengthening the traditional international support measures in the area of trade and aid, a new generation of international support measures with regard to aid, trade, investment, transfer of technology, innovative sources of finance, and so forth, was indispensable for the success of a new programme of action. On that basis, the Office prepared a synthesis document outlining "Draft elements of a possible new programme of

[2] UNCTAD documents TD/B/EX(49)/2, TD/B/EX(49)/2/Corr.1 and 2.

action for least developed countries for the next decade", with a view to focus ideas and stimulate thinking among all stakeholders in preparation for the Conference.

D. Consultations with the Government of Turkey

17. The Secretary-General of the Conference visited Ankara and Istanbul from 12 to 16 April 2010 to discuss substantive and organizations aspects for the Conference with the host country Government. The visit included meetings with key political authorities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant ministries and sought to address the following issues and to exchange views on the policy and strategic aspects of the Conference: the role of the Government of Turkey in the preparatory process; the role of parliamentarians; and civil society and private sector preparations and media coverage.

18. The Office of the High Representative, along with key United Nations Secretariat departments, such as the Conference Management Service, the Security and Safety Service, the Office of Information Technology and the Department of Public Information, undertook two planning missions to Istanbul and Ankara from 28 June to 2 July and from 18 to 22 October 2010. The missions held extensive discussions with the host country authorities and viewed the excellent facilities being made available for the Conference.

E. Group of Eminent Persons

19. The Secretary-General appointed a Group of Eminent Persons, co-chaired by Alpha Oumar Konaré, former President of Mali, and James Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank, to advise on the international support measures needed to accelerate development in the least developed countries. The members of the Group have been selected in the light of their international stature, expertise and strong commitment to development issues. The Group is tasked with assisting the United Nations system in its efforts to build political will and mobilize global action that will result in a new programme of action for the least developed countries for the next decade. The Group will also undertake efforts to raise public awareness on important issues affecting the least developed countries in key areas such as trade, investment, technology transfer, official development assistance, building of productive capacities, adaptation to the effects of climate change, and the creation of a stimulus package for least developed countries to manage the impact of the global financial crisis. The Group had its first meeting on 13 October 2010 in New York and is expected to present its report of recommendations to the Secretary-General in March 2011, envisaging new paradigms for transforming the economies of least developed countries.

F. Coordination of United Nations system-wide preparations

20. The Office of the High Representative organized four inter-agency consultative group meetings during 2009 and 2010 to coordinate the United Nations system activities in support of the preparatory process for the Conference. These meetings were held alternatively in New York and Geneva to ensure full involvement and active participation of all United Nations system organizations.

Forty-five United Nations system entities and other relevant organizations participated in the inter-agency meetings that reviewed the organizational structure of the preparatory process and agreed on the list of pre-Conference events as well as other substantive contributions, such as pre-Conference publications. At the most recent inter-agency meeting held in Geneva on 26 October 2010, partners reviewed the list of proposed side events to be held on the margins of the Conference with the objective of enhancing inter-agency cooperation on cross-cutting priority themes.

21. Several thematic pre-Conference events already took place with participation of all stakeholders. Their outcomes would provide important substantive inputs to the outcome document of the Conference.

22. The first event was jointly organized by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Office of the High Representative, in Vienna on 3 and 4 December 2009 on the theme "The impact of the global financial and economic crisis on the least developed countries' productive capacities and trade". The resulting Plan of Action has the objective to achieve economic diversification among least developed countries in order to enhance food security and productive capacities and to reduce vulnerability to external shocks.

23. A seminar on the topic "Migration, development and remittances in the least developed countries' context" was co-organized by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Population Fund and the MacArthur Foundation, in cooperation with Office of the High Representative and the Permanent Mission of Nepal to the United Nations, on 17 June 2010 in New York. In order to facilitate the transfer of remittances, the seminar concluded that home and host countries can lower transfer costs, through improved technology, regulatory changes, and removing taxation on repatriated remittances. To make the most out of remittances, a larger share should be channelled into productive use and private sector development activities through co-development schemes.

24. The Ministerial Meeting on the theme "Enhancing the mobilization of financial resources for least developed countries' development" was held in Lisbon, on 2 and 3 October 2010 and was co-organized by the Office of the High Representative and the Government of Portugal, which generously provided the necessary financial resources to ensure the effective participation of least developed countries. The Meeting benefited from the active participation of least developed countries and their partner countries. It stressed the importance of domestic resource mobilization, improving the quantity and quality of official development assistance to least developed countries, attracting foreign direct investments to least developed countries' priority sectors through home country incentives and the importance of innovative sources of finance, including new Special Drawing Rights and taxes on international transactions. The Meeting concluded that the growing development needs of least developed countries as well as the multiple global crises require a global stimulus package for least developed countries and the creation of a special crisis-mitigation and resilience-building facility for least developed countries to enable them to respond to shocks.

25. A pre-conference event on the theme "Enhanced international support and smooth transition of least developed countries towards graduation" took place on 15 October 2010 as a side event to the Second Committee of the General Assembly. The event, organized by the Office of the High Representative, featured Abul Maal

Abdul Muhith, Finance Minister of Bangladesh, as keynote speaker and benefited from expert presentations from academia, UNCTAD, the Government of Maldives as graduating LDC and the Commission of the European Union as the only development partner having implemented a concrete smooth transition measure. The presentations and ensuing interactive discussions with delegations from least developed countries and partner countries examined the reasons behind the slow progress made by least developed countries towards achieving the internationally agreed goals and graduating from the category and suggested policy measures to make the transition from LDC to post-LDC life a prospect to be looked forward to.

26. The UNCTAD pre-Conference event, held at Geneva from 27 to 29 October 2010, brought together delegates to deliberate on the theme "Building productive capacities in least developed countries for inclusive and sustainable development", in line with UNCTAD policy advice that poverty is best addressed through broad economic progress. The meeting highlighted the opportunities missed by least developed countries over the past decades to improve economic specialization, make sufficient infrastructural investment, and develop science and technology capacities. Delegates examined how focusing on developing productive capacities affected national policies intended to promote development and poverty reduction in least developed countries, as well as the impact on the design of international support measures, particularly those aimed at attracting increased domestic and foreign investment which would lead to job creation and higher value goods and services. That, in turn, would raise salaries and domestic consumer spending, spurring greater economic demand and generating even more jobs.

27. Other pre-Conference events to be held between November 2010 and February 2011 would cover key issues for least developed countries such as science, technology and innovation, challenges and opportunities arising from climate change, aid for trade, promoting democratic governance, enhancing food security through agricultural development, universal access to essential services and intellectual property rights. The Government of India generously offered to host a pre-Conference event in February 2011 on the theme "Harnessing the positive contribution of South-South cooperation for least developed countries' development" in New Delhi at the ministerial level, including the provision of the necessary financial resources to ensure the effective participation of least developed countries.[3]

G. Advocacy and promotion of the Conference

28. The Office of the High Representative has formulated, in close cooperation with the Department of Public Information, a communication strategy for the Conference. The strategy will focus on:

(a) In the least developed countries: increasing awareness, mobilizing grass-roots involvement and building confidence;

(b) In donor countries: increasing public awareness and substantive knowledge of least developed countries issues and mobilizing greater political support and resources for action;

[3] A more detailed report on all pre-Conference events will be submitted to the second session of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee.

(c) In emerging donor countries: increasing public awareness and substantive knowledge of least developed countries' issues, expanding partnerships and alliances and mobilizing greater political support and resources for action.

29. Press conferences in New York and Geneva have been held to brief the United Nations-accredited press corps about progress made in the Conference preparations. Several media interviews (radio, television and print) have been conducted with the Secretary-General of the Conference. Further, a series of press statements have been released to coincide with the launch of the Group of Eminent Persons and the first meetings of the Civil Society and Private Sector Steering Committees in New York in October 2010.

30. A Conference-specific website (https://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/ldc/home) has been created in collaboration with the Department of Public Information. A logo has been designed by the Office of the High Representative in consultation with the Department.

H. Meeting of Ministers of the least developed countries

31. The Ministerial Meeting of least developed countries was held on 27 September 2010 on the margins of the general debate of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly. Chaired by Bhim Bahadur Rawal, Minister for Home Affairs of Nepal, the meeting adopted a Ministerial Declaration embodying the group's position and identifying priority actions and expectations of concrete deliverables at the Conference. Ministers recognized that while some progress had been achieved, most countries remained poor and fragile. The economic, food and energy crises, as well as the impact of climate change, had reversed some of that progress. Enhanced assistance from the international community was necessary to bring the development process back on track. The need for greater visibility of least developed countries on the international agenda was highlighted. The Conference represented a crucial opportunity to formulate a comprehensive results-oriented programme of action to promote the development and transformation of least developed countries. Ministers also stressed the need for the Conference follow-up to be strictly monitored and its outcome effectively enacted.

I. Resource mobilization for the preparatory process for the Conference

32. The Office of the High Representative prepared a project document to mobilize resources to support the substantive preparations for the Conference. Following the submission of the document, the High Representative initiated consultations with representative donor countries, emerging donors and international organizations to mobilize resources for the Conference and its preparatory activities. Generous support has been offered from the Government of Turkey, which has granted $2 million for the preparatory process. Other donors who contributed to the Least Developed Country Trust Fund managed by the Office of the High Representative include India ($250,000 for least developed countries' participation), Belgium (400,000 euros) and Finland ($50,000 for least developed countries' participation). Pledges made so far fall short of the total budget for the preparatory activities and for ensuring the effective participation of least developed countries to

the two sessions of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee and the Conference itself. Therefore, other donors are called upon to contribute as soon as possible to support the substantive and logistic preparations for the Conference.

J. Participation and contribution of civil society

33. To ensure the participation of a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the Conference, the Office of the High Representative held numerous consultations with civil society representatives, especially from the least developed countries, to mobilize civil society input into the preparatory process and the Conference. A concept note has been prepared to guide civil society participation and substantive contributions to the Conference, and to set the structure for the civil society track.

34. The Office of the High Representative has provided substantive and financial support to the holding of two regional civil society reviews in Addis Ababa, and Port Vila, in March and August 2010, respectively. At the latter, participants called for initiating, collaborating and partnering with civil society organizations and citizens in the planning, implementation and achievements of national priorities and the Brussels Programme of Action in order to accelerate graduation from least developed country status.

35. In October 2010, the Office of the High Representative launched the Civil Society Steering Committee, which is expected to provide the substantive guidance to civil society engagement in the Conference. It will meet at least four times during the preparatory process. Two of the meetings would be scheduled to coincide with the meetings of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee in New York. In addition, to ensure the effective functioning of the Steering Committee, the Office of the High Representative provided financial assistance for the establishment of a civil society secretariat in Kathmandu.

36. Moreover, the Office of the High Representative has supported the participation of at least two members of the Steering Committee to major pre-Conference events, where speaking slots were afforded to ensure that civil society concerns are fully integrated into the preparatory process. This involvement recognizes civil society's vital role in representing and giving voice to the needs and aspirations of ordinary people in the least developed countries. Given its community-level presence, civil society is able to bring the experiences, concerns and priorities of ordinary citizens to the policymaking process.

37. Finally, a web portal geared specifically towards civil society (http://www.un-ngls.org/ldc4) has been launched in collaboration with the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Services.

K. Participation and contribution of the private sector

38. The Office of the High Representative has also launched preparations for the active involvement of the private sector. Given its pivotal role in the structural transformation of the least developed countries' economies, especially with respect to enhancing productive capacity and diversification, the private sector's contribution to the Conference is expected to identify concrete, action-oriented

proposals addressing problems and challenges specific to least developed countries in the area of investment, enterprise development and finance.

39. The Private Sector Steering Committee of the private sector track of the Fourth Conference was launched by the Office of the High Representative, in close collaboration with the United Nations Global Compact, on 20 October 2010 in New York. Representatives of private sector networks from Africa, Asia-Pacific and North America participated along with three Turkish private sector networks as well as UNDP, UNCTAD and United Nations Office for Partnerships. The meeting agreed that the inclusion of the private sector as a genuine partner in the Conference preparations would be a key factor to guaranteeing a successful outcome of the Conference and recognized the private sector as an agent of change that had the enormous potential to provide opportunities for the poor and enable them to generate incomes.

40. In interactive discussions, the Steering Committee decided on the key steps for the preparation of the private sector track of the Conference and defined individual contributions to be provided. Subcommittees were established to oversee and contribute to the organization of the three private sector track events to be held during the Conference: the Investment and Partnership Summit, the Business Forum and the Trade Fair.

41. The Investment and Partnership Summit is being planned for the afternoon of the first day of the Conference, with the participation of Heads of State and Government and Chief Executive Officers of private corporations. The Summit would aim at identifying action-oriented measures and recommendations, announce concrete projects and partnerships and possibly adopt a declaration by its high-level participants. The Business Forum would take the form of an ongoing event for the duration of the Conference and target Governments, businesses, United Nations system agencies and other development partners and would address key priority themes for least developed countries' private sector development. The Forum would allow for Government-to-business, business-to-business and business-to-Government interaction and promote the forging of partnerships in support of private sector development in least developed countries. Furthermore, the Forum would launch the "Global Business Partnership Forum for Least Developed Countries' Development" with the overarching purpose to promote and oversee the implementation of partnerships towards least developed countries' structural transformation during the next decade. The Trade Fair would be held alongside the Business Forum and involve international investors and buyers. It would showcase least developed countries' commercial opportunities, producers and exporters.

L. Participation and contribution of parliamentarians

42. Given the important role that parliaments play in implementing international commitments, the Office of the High Representative has also initiated consultations with the Inter-Parliamentary Union to mobilize parliamentary involvement in the Conference. A guide on mobilizing parliamentary support for the Brussels Programme of Action was issued jointly with the Union. Parliamentarians were actively involved in both country and regional-level preparations. A separate parliamentarians' forum would be organized on the day before the start of the Conference in Istanbul. These activities aim at strengthening parliamentary

ownership of the new programme of action and at ensuring more effective follow-up by the legislature as much as the executive in both least developed countries and their development partners during the next decade.

M. Proposed structure of the Conference

43. The proposed structure of the Conference would follow the outline of previous conferences, in particular the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and recent United Nations practice. It would include a high-level opening ceremony, a general plenary, a committee of the whole — with the possibility of bifurcation — negotiating the outcome document, interactive thematic round tables at the ministerial level for policy dialogue on key priority issues and parallel tracks for parliamentarians, civil society and the private sector and side events.